# mac monitor

by Steve Cisler
Library Evangelist
Apple Computer Library

## THE ELECTRONIC WHOLE EARTH CATALOG: MULTIMEDIA AT LOW COST

Outside of your professional career as a librarian or information seeker, what were the three most influential reference books in your life? I would enjoy hearing your answers; in the meantime, here are mine.

In 1952 when I was nine, I received the first two books: *The World Almanac* and a 10-cent copy of *Johnson-Smith Catalog*. The first one opened up other countries, world sports records, and other news events in a way that television had not. The second was as thick as the almanac and promised me thousands of ways of getting control over my 9-year-old world: by making people laugh (dribble glasses, magic tricks, ventriloquist dummies) or by amazing them (trick whips, giant bean seeds, sea monkeys, stamp collections).

Years passed before the third title made a similar impression on me. The year was 1968 and the book was the *Whole Earth Catalog*, a volume so revered that you may still find the tattered, oversize volume on a shelf in your public library. It was a compendium of tools for a new age, and books were one of the primary tools, as were solar devices, gardening equipment and construction equipment. Several editions came out over the years, all with Stewart Brand as editor or involved in some special way. A non-profit foundation was started to serve as an umbrella for various products. In 1984 they produced the *Whole Earth Software Catalog*, and their magazine, the *Whole Earth Review*, has been covering unusual developments in a wide variety of areas including the personal computer industry ever since. Kevin Kelly has been at the helm for many years, and his mark is also on the Electronic Whole Earth Catalog, a CD-ROM product which is the subject of this month's column.

### THE ELECTRONIC WHOLE EARTH CATALOG (EWEC)

First, here is what the publishers say about their work:

*The Electronic Whole Earth Catalog is an evaluation and access device. It can help a user discover what is worth getting and how to get it. We're here to point, not to sell. Text and graphics excerpted here are provided for the reader to aid in evaluating what's being reviewed. We have no financial obligation or connection to any of the suppliers listed. We only review stuff we think is great. Why waste your time with anything else? An item is listed in this Catalog if it is deemed:*

1. *Useful as a tool,*
2. *Relevant to independent education,*
3. *High quality or low cost,*
4. *Easily available by mail.*

This CD-ROM disk retails for just under $150 and only works on the Apple Macintosh. I have used it extensively on a Macintosh Plus and Macintosh II, but with less than 2 megabytes of RAM, you should use a system with fewer INIT files and fonts and desk accessories. There are 413.5MB of files: approximately 29MB of HyperCard stacks, 24MB of inverted files for rapid searching, and over 360MB of sound files. There are about 9,500 HyperCard cards, over 2,500 items with 4,000 pictures, 2,000 text excerpts, and 500 sounds.

### DEVELOPING THE PRODUCT

The advent of CD-ROM brought the Point Foundation, Apple Computer, and later,

Broderbund Software together. In some ways CD-ROM is the perfect medium for the Catalog; the Macintosh is the platform that can utilize sound, graphics, and text on an optical disk; the electronic product allowed Broderbund to enter the CD-ROM market. The development of this product is a good example of why optical products generally cost more than print versions. Working with various supporters in Apple's Advanced Technology Group, the Point Foundation spent more than 12,500 hours developing this disk. The three partners put in more than $200,000, plus hardware and software. How did the development differ from the production of the text-based products that are often mentioned in these pages?

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At the start, they were using the unreleased version of HyperCard. Since HyperCard allows sound, graphics, and links to be included, it was not just a matter of moving ASCII files and providing some sort of search engine for the text. A great deal of energy went into designing the interface. They used various scanning methods for screen backgrounds and for converting the sample illustrations and small pictures of the book covers or record jackets. Displaying complex drawings and photographs in black and white with a resolution of 72 dots per inch is a compromise. It is an important first step, but it whets my appetite for high-resolution color images. This is possible when programs are used to extend the capabilities of HyperCard, but Broderbund and the Whole Earth crew wisely decided not to penalize the millions of Mac users who have a 9-inch black and white screen. So it is limited to the resolution of the Mac Plus screen.

Converting the text portion of the catalog was not as simple as they had hoped. Aesthetically, they wanted the individual entries to wrap at the proper points on the screen, so it was often

FIGURE 1

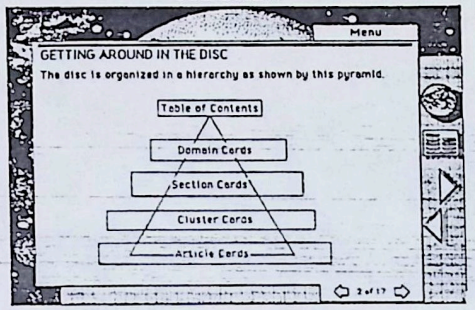



FIGURE 2

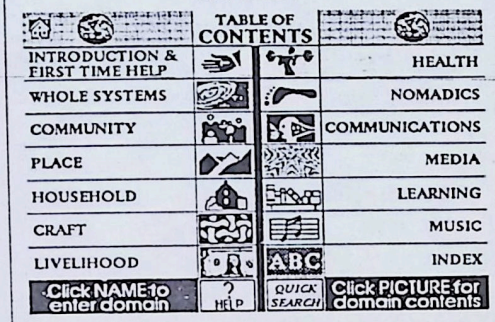
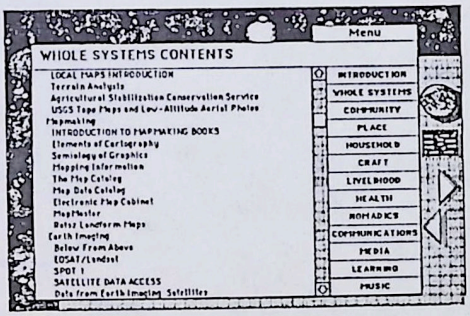



FIGURE 3

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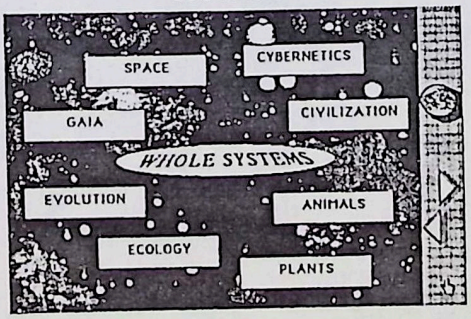

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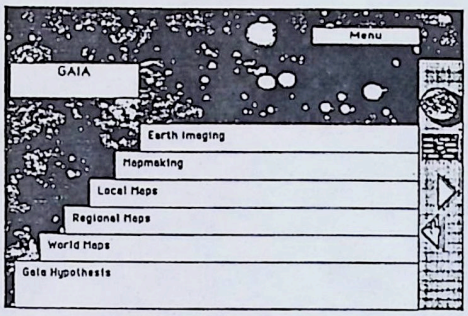



FIGURE 6

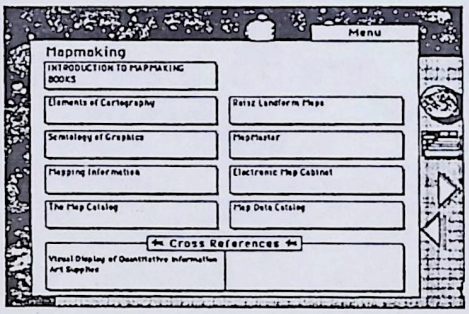



FIGURE 7

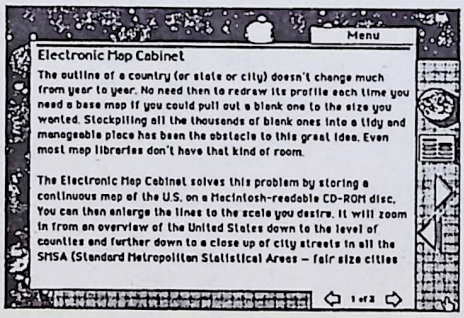



FIGURE 8

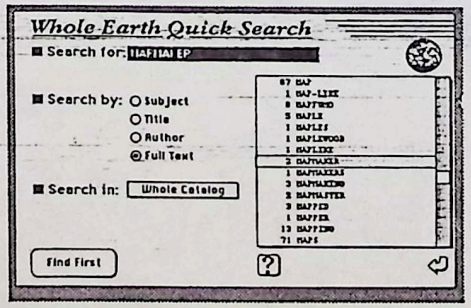
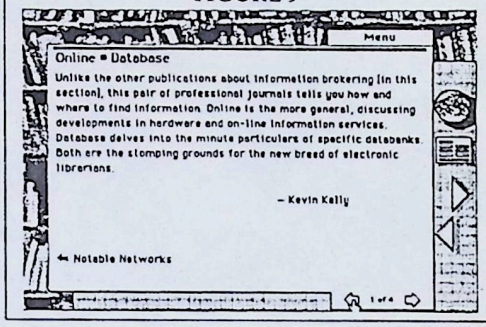



FIGURE 9




simpler to rekey the text, than to fiddle around with an imported text file that was full of odd line feeds. Because HyperCard can only display one font and style, book titles are not italicized. Most of the text is displayed in 12-point Geneva, again because that is the default font that every Macintosh user has. It is quite legible and the reader can print the article if reading on-screen is tiring.

## HOW THE DISK IS ORGANIZED

EWEC is the ultimate browsing medium. Combining such disparate material with HyperCard and Mark Zimmerman's Tex search engine, and putting it on CD-ROM allows the user to graze everywhere in the database or hunt for specific items. The tools for narrow Boolean searches are not provided, just single words in context. When Bill Atkinson, the author of HyperCard, spent an evening with a copy of EWEC, he said he wound up buying $800 worth of books and tools that he ran across in the articles. Any item that is for sale includes an order form that inputs the item name and price; all you add is your name, address, a check for the full amount and send it to a store that is not connected with the Point Foundation. Material and prices are accurate through the latter part of 1988.

The card pictured in Figure 1 shows the hierarchical pyramid consisting of the table of contents at the top, the domain cards below, followed by the section, cluster and article cards. The Table of Contents card (Figure 2) lists the domains: Introduction, Whole Systems, Community, Place, Household, Craft, Livelihood, Health, Nomadics, Communications, Media, Learning, Music, and Index. Click on the Whole Systems icon to reach the listing of all the items in that domain (Figure 3); jump to that item by pointing and clicking on

the one line description. You can shift domains by selecting one of the items in the vertical list in capital letters. If you click on the Whole Systems text shown in Figure 2, the program links you to the diagram (Figure 4) that shows the clusters of various whole systems: Space, Cybernetics, Civilization, Animals, Plants, Ecology, Evolution, and Gaia. Clicking on the Gaia button moves you to the section of subjects: Earth Imaging, Mapmaking, Local Maps, Regional Maps, World Maps, and Gaia Hypothesis (Figure 5). Another level lower in the hierarchy (Figure 6) shows the group of articles related to mapmaking. At the lower right part of each screen are two triangles for moving back and forth within the sections or clusters or cards that comprise each article. Figure 7 shows one of three cards of the review of Electronic Map Cabinet from Highlighted Data.

I found that moving between the cards and different areas can be confusing if you click too rapidly or too often. The commands are stacked up and carried out no more quickly than the CD-ROM drive can respond. Once you get used to this, navigation is quite simple.

The menu shows you where you are in the hierarchy and lets you move to a higher level or to the Index , the Table of Contents, or to Quick Search (Figure 8), based on Mark Zimmerm ⁻'s Tex, a shareware retrieval system written .or HyperCard. Since EWEC came out, Zimmerman has added proximity searching to his program and will be implementing full Boolean searching for text, and is working on ways of searching for graphic items as well. Although EWEC does not have these enhancements, I find Tex very useful when I don't want to browse through the hierarchy of cards. I remembered hearing Kevin Kelly make some comment about our publications, so I brought up the full-text index and typed in **Garman**, then looked at the hit context and clicked on the box to jump to the article, part of which is shown in Figure 9.

## ADDING VALUE THROUGH SOUND

Where EWEC is vastly superior to the printed product is in the addition of sound. Over 500 digitized clips of less than a minute in duration to several minutes have been added. Each is marked by the music note icon in article cards. There are sound effects, bird calls, wonderful selections of Robin Williams telling the PecosBill legend, Jack Nicholson reading from Rudyard Kipling, Mississippi Blues artists giving guitar lessons, and hundreds of music clips from mail order firms around the U.S. The quality of the sound is excellent, and I recommend that you attach headphones or supplemental speakers to bring out the full quality. I've used $15 imported speakers I picked up at a flea market as well as $200 Bose units for presentations. Either will enhance the listening experience.

**There are sound effects, bird calls, wonderful selections of Robin Williams telling the Pecos Bill legend, Jack Nicholson reading from Rudyard Kipling, Mississippi Blues artists giving guitar lessons...**

Our experience in Apple Library has been that young people and adults really enjoy browsing through the text and sampling the music for hours at a time. Many people have remarked that the sound samples are extensive enough to help them decide to buy the record or audio CD being featured.

Although EWEC is not meant as a sales catalog, I envision the day when retailers or mail order firms send out CD-ROMs with images and sounds and have transparent online links for pricing and ordering. Distribution of large image and sound databases will continue to be much cheaper via CD-ROM than by ISDN or fiber optic for quite a few years.

(For more information about Broderbund products call 800/521-6263. The Point Foundation is located at 27 Gate Five Road, Sausalito, CA 94965. EWEC is also available through software retailers.)

Communications to the author should be addressed to Steve Cisler, P.O. Box 992, Cupertino, CA 95015; 408/974-3258; BIX—scisler; ALANET—ALA0728; OnTyme—CLASS.ONLINE/SC; AppleLink—Cisler1; Internet—sac@apple.com; CompuServe—73240,1016.